



SAMHAIN

Recipes for a Celtic New Year



Gwendolyn Mathers

Samhain: Recipes for a Celtic New Year

By Gwendolyn Mathers

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Miss Kitchen Witch

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Once a year, when the harvest has been gathered, the trees shed their summer colors, and creatures of the wild retreat for sheltered hibernation... The veil that separates the living from the dead is lifted. Samhain arrives, the last day of the Celtic lunar calendar and the ancient version of our Halloween.

On this day, all forms of spirits are free to cross over into the realm of the living and walk among us for just one night. Some are the spirits of loved ones, gone before us. Others are malevolent sprites come to cause mischief and mayhem.

Special protections would be taken to protect yourself and your household from such tricks and also to avoid being dragged down into the world of the dead. The ancient Celts would disguise themselves as versions of the faeries, spirits, and ghosts to either scare away those that threatened them or perhaps “blend-in” with supernatural revelers.

Offerings of food and drink were made to ancestors and spirits, to fortify or placate any mischief-makers. Lanterns were carved from root vegetables, mostly turnips, to be carried through the darkness or placed in windowsills to scare away threatening specters. The echoes of these practices are still seen in festive decorating, trick or treating, telling ghost stories, and dressing up in costumes!

Join me in tasting some old magic of Samhain with these traditional recipes; lay your ghosts to rest with the fields this season, don your disguise from the fairies, and cast a few spells of good fortune for a bright new year.

Miss Kitchen Witch



Embrace the colors of Samhain with festive fall vegetables. This warm salad mimics vibrant autumn foliage and reminds us all to eat a little more seasonally.

Warm Autumn Kissed Salad with Apple Cider Dressing

1 cup black lentils
2 cups vegetable stock
2 bay leaves
1 lb golden beets
1-2 pears, sliced thinly
pumpkin seeds
dried cranberries
arugula, baby kale, or mixed salad greens

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup apple cider vinegar
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup olive oil
2 tbsp maple syrup
2 tsp brown mustard
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp garlic powder
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp dry tarragon
salt and pepper

Par-cook the beets by steaming for 20-30 minutes. Once they are soft on the outside, carefully peel the skin away.

Preheat the oven to 400°F. Chop up the peeled beets and toss with a little olive oil and salt. Bake for about 20 minutes, until they are caramelized and cooked through.

Meanwhile, bring the vegetable stock and lentils to a simmer in a medium pot or pan over low-medium heat. Cook, partially covered, for about 30 minutes, until al dente. Drain, rinse if starchy, cover, and set aside.

Blend all the dressing ingredients. Drizzle the dressing over the warm lentils and toss. Fold in beets and serve over the salad greens. Top with the sliced pear, dried cranberries, pumpkin seeds, sprinkle with salt and pepper, and add an extra drizzle of dressing if you like.



New Year, New Fortunes

On the cusp of a new year filled with possibilities and the netherworld open to the whispers of the dead, spells were guided by the presence of spirits. Divination was even performed through kitchen witchery—small charms with various meanings would be wrapped in tiny parcels and mixed into the dish or batter before baking.

The charms varied, but it was believed that faeries determined who would receive each charm. Many dishes are said to have been served with this form of fortune-telling, perhaps with whatever the household was likely or able to offer: Fadge (Apple-Potato Cake), Colcannon, Barmbrack, Boxty (Savory Potato Cakes), or even desserts like trifle.

The more popular charms included a ring for marriage by springtime, a dried pea for spinsterhood, a bean or coin for riches, a rag for poverty, a button for bachelorhood, and (most shockingly) a match to foretell an abusive husband!

We can practice our own predictions, but perhaps with more modern and respectful meanings. Instead use tokens folded in parchment paper to predict a coming year of excitement, travel, change, romance, strife, growth, etc. Find tokens and experiences that are meaningful and entertaining to you—just be sure they are oven-safe.



Colcannon is eaten throughout the year in Ireland as a comfort food, though it's a traditional Samhain dish. The vegetables vary by region – try adding different greens, scallions, leeks, or even parsnips in the mash. For an even a creamier dish, skip the bake.

Colcannon

2 lb unpeeled golden potatoes, cubed

½ cup soy milk or cashew cream

2 tbsp vegan butter

1 medium onion, diced

1 bunch tuscan kale, shredded

2 cups cabbage, shredded

3 cloves garlic, minced

2 tsp salt

½ tsp each black and white pepper

½ lb fresh shiitake mushrooms, stems

removed and sliced thin

1 tsp smoked paprika

½ tsp salt

2-3 tbsp olive oil

Preheat the oven to 400°F. Toss the sliced mushrooms with the paprika and salt to coat. Drizzle evenly with oil and work it into the mushrooms. Spread in a single layer on a baking sheet and bake for about 20 minutes, tossing a few times. They should be a deep color, dry, and crispy.

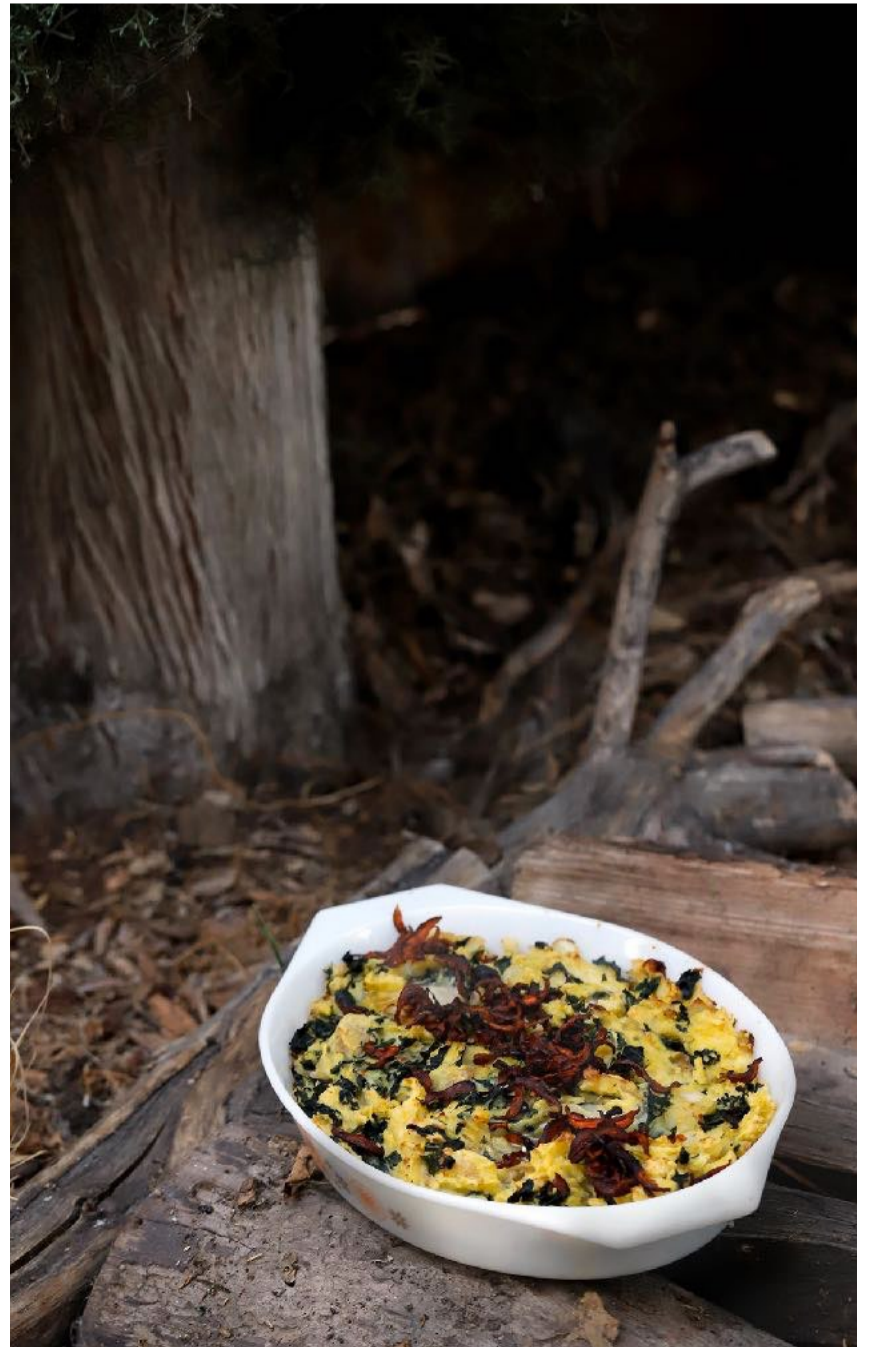
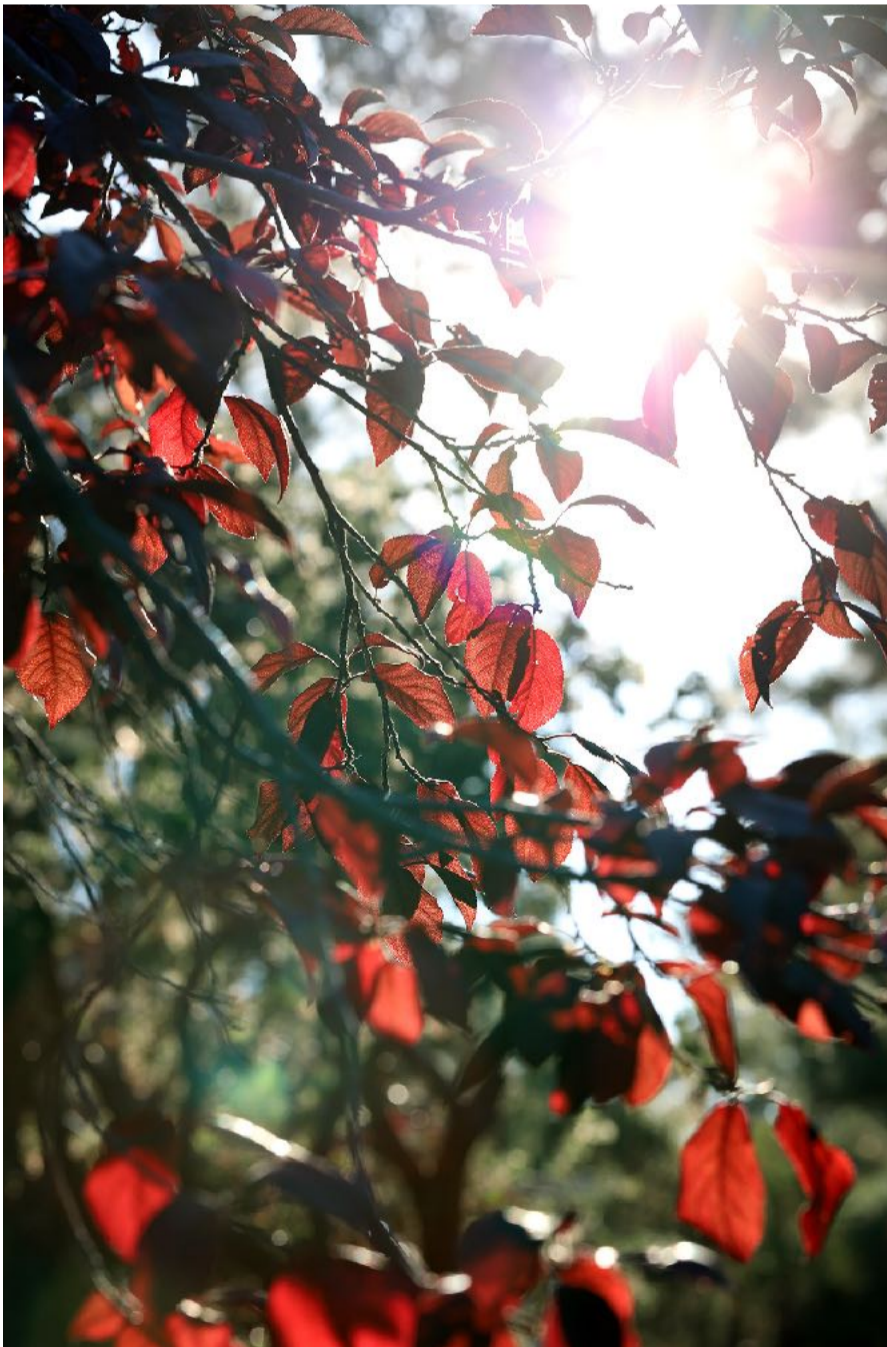
Place the potatoes in medium pot of water and bring to a boil. Cook until tender, about 20-25 minutes. Drain, reserving the cooking water.



Mash the potatoes, adding the vegan butter and non-dairy milk and/or some of the cooking water. The potatoes should be quite creamy.

While the the potatoes are cooking, heat some oil in a medium pan and add the onion and garlic. Cook for about 5 minutes until fragrant. Add the kale and cabbage and sauté for 5 more minutes.

Fold the cooked vegetables into the potatoes and add the salt and peppers. At this time you can add your charms wrapped in little parchment paper envelopes. Transfer to a casserole dish and bake uncovered for 20 minutes, until golden crispy on top and edges. Sprinkle with crumbled mushroom bacon and a few extra dabs of vegan butter.



The earliest version of Barmbrack, a traditional sweet bread, was leavened with the leftover hop liquid from beer brewing. Instead of fruit, like modern recipes, Barmbrack was studded with caraway seeds. Later came the addition of currants soaked in tea or whiskey and candied citrus peel since zest was not available fresh at this time of year. Many modern bakes resemble a heavy fruit cake, but I prefer the yeasted version.

Barmbrack

2 cups mixed dried fruit: sultanas, raisins, cranberries, cherries

½ cup strong black tea

2 tbsp candied orange or marmalade

4 cups all-purpose flour

1 tsp salt

½ tsp each cinnamon, allspice

¼ tsp each clove, ginger, coriander, nutmeg

1 cup soy milk, room temp

¼ evaporated cane sugar

1 packet active dry yeast (2¼ tsp)

2 tbsp Irish whiskey

5 tbsp vegan butter

Soak the fruit in the tea overnight at room temperature.

Start the yeast in the warm soy milk and sugar. Set aside until foamy. Whisk 3½ cups of flour with the spices and salt in a large bowl. Crumble in the butter. Add the whiskey to the yeast mixture and stir into the dry ingredients.

Pour out the dough onto a floured surface and knead for 8 minutes, adding in more flour as needed. Knead in the fruit-soaked tea and orange. The dough should be smooth, but not sticky.

At this time you can add your charms wrapped in little parchment paper envelopes. Place the dough in an oiled bowl, cover and let rise until nearly doubled about 1½ hrs.

After the first rise, gently punch down and knead a few times. Shape it into a ball and place into an 8" greased cake pan. Let rise again for 40 minutes. Preheat oven to 350°F. Bake for 40 minutes. until dark and golden. Cover with foil if it darkens too quickly.

Remove from tin to cool. Serve warm with whipped maple butter.



Wassail is associated today with the Christian Advent and the subject of several holiday carols although it's origins are tied to the Pagan festivals of Lammás (The Festival of Apples) and Samhain as a warming and reviving celebratory harvest drink.

Among the Celts it was called La Mas Nhbúl or Lambswool for the chunks of sweet baked apples and frothy head created when simmering the drink and then throwing it (mixing between two mugs). Traditionally, it was served in a communal bowl that was passed among guests as they would toast and sing, blessing healthy and fertile orchards.

Lambswool/La Mas Nhbúl

24 oz hard cider or brown ale

4 apples, cored

½ cup turbinado sugar*

1 thumb sized chunk raw ginger, peeled

2-4 cloves

nutmeg, freshly grated

Preheat oven to 375°F. Bake the apples, uncovered for 50 minutes or until completely soft. Once the apples are nearly done, start warming the cider or ale in a pot over low-medium heat. Add the sugar and stir to dissolve, add the fresh ginger and simmer, covered.

Once the apples are ready, remove the skin and roughly puree or mash them a few chunks are traditional.

Scoop out the ginger, cloves, and whisk in the pureed apples. Let it simmer a few more minutes to infuse the apples. Throw (pour) the mixture between two pots to build up some heavy froth. Portion into heavy mugs and serve with freshly grated nutmeg.

**some ciders may need less sugar than ale*







I hope these Samhain traditions and recipes help you discover some magical celebrations! Samhain can show us old ways to cherish ancestors, enjoy simple games with good company, express gratitude for harvests, and live in sync with the seasons and environment. It doesn't matter if you're religious, spiritual, or not — enjoying wholesome food with friends while protecting the earth is good for everyone's *soul*.

Gwendolyn Mathers, also known as Miss Kitchen Witch, is a professional vegan chef offering consulting, catering, and plant-based pastries to the Southern California area. Online and long distance, she provides other services such as recipe testing, menu development, and food photography.

You can find recipes and more at GwendolynMathers.com